CAPT. WENDY LAWRENCE is a veteran of four Space Shuttle flights, logging a total of 1,225 hours in space. But her incredible career, which continues today, is marked by many other crowning achievements.

Born in Jacksonville, Florida, Lawrence was the daughter and granddaughter of UW Naval aviators. She graduated from Fort Hunt High School in Alexandria, Virginia in 1977, and received a BS degree in ocean engineering from U.S. Naval Academy in 1981.

With a Navy career in her blood, Lawrence was designated as a naval aviator in July 1982. She served as special weapons training officer, detachment maintenance officer and squadron Naval Air Training and Procedures Standardization officer at Helicopter Support Squadron Six (HC-6) in Norfolk, Virginia. A member of only the second class in Naval Academy history to include women, she went on to rank 12th in her graduating class, becoming instrumental in forming the women’s crew team. She also served as Deputy Brigade Commander and earned one of just five naval aviator billets available to women in her class. She was one of the first two female helicopter pilots to make an extended deployment to the Indian Ocean as part of a carrier battle group and accumulated more than 1,000 hours in the Boeing Vertol CH-46 “Sea Knight” helicopter.

Capt. Lawrence was selected for the Secretary of the Navy master's degree program in ocean sciences at MIT and Woods Hole Oceanographic Institution. After completion of her degree, she was assigned to Helicopter Anti-Submarine Squadron Light 30 as officer-in-charge of Detachment ALFA. Her detachment deployed on Chauvenet and provided support to Oceanographic Unit 5 for coastal surveying operations off of Kenya and Vieques Island, Puerto Rico.

She returned to the Naval Academy in 1990 to serve as a physics and leadership instructor and novice women’s crew coach.

Achieving her childhood dream of flying in space, Lawrence was selected by NASA in 1992. She began training for her first flight onboard Space Shuttle Endeavour as the first female graduate of the U.S. Naval Academy to fly in space. Aboard Endeavour in 1995, the STS-67 mission was to study ultraviolet light radiating from distant objects and galaxies. Lawrence went on to serve on three more Shuttle crews over the next 10 years, including missions to Russian space station Mir and the International Space Station. Her final flight in 2005, STS-114 “Return to Flight,” was the first shuttle flight after the loss of the Columbia. Here she and evaluated new procedures for the inspection and repair of Shuttle’s thermal protection system and delivered much need supplies to the International Space Station.

Lawrence also served as NASA’s Director of Operations at the Gagarin Cosmonaut Training Center in Star City, Russia. Astronaut Barbara Morgan worked with Lawrence at NASA and said that her reputation was that of both an “outstanding leader and team member, which is critical to NASA mission success” and sought her out as a mentor when she was designated loadmaster for STS-118.

After 11 years, four Shuttle flights and 50 days in space, Lawrence retired from NASA in 2006 and moved on to her “third” career as STEM educator. In 2008, she became the first female Astronaut Encounter presenter at the Kennedy Space Center Visitor Complex. Her dedication to inspiring students, particularly young women, to pursue careers in STEM and aviation has been unmatched. When it comes to supporting educational programming in the Pacific Northwest, distance is no barrier. She has traveled across Washington state, from Bellingham to Moses Lake and Seattle, to support multiple Museum of Flight educational programs over the past 10 years. Lawrence has also been the “astronaut of choice,” participating in all but two of the 20 Idaho Science and Aerospace Scholar programs in Boise.

Lawrence also helped bring the Zero Robotics program to Washington state. She has worked with the Girl Scouts of America and the Sally Ride Family Foundation, and is one of the founders of AstraFemina, a brand new nonprofit organization whose mission is to inspire young women to be tomorrow’s STEM stars and a goal to partner with other STEM organizations to reach 10,000 girls over the next year.

Capt. Wendy Lawrence has mastered the art of being engaging and inspiring, and yet humble and practical, and understands the important responsibility in serving as a role model to countless young women, motivating them follow her incredible path and soar to new heights.

Written by Alison Bailey, Associate Director of Development